

Doing work that matters at Los Alamos

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by Tess Lavezzi Light

My first “real” job after getting my Ph.D. in astrophysics was a postdoctoral position studying deep space images from the Hubble telescope. It was fascinating research, but I wanted to do something with a more immediate impact. Simply put, I wanted to be able to explain to my mom at Thanksgiving why my work mattered to her.

So when I lamented to a friend that I wanted to do work with a greater impact on society, he suggested I look at jobs at Los Alamos National Laboratory. My response? “I want to help the world — not blow it up.”

He assured me that Los Alamos was much more than the place that built the bomb, so I gave it a look. He was right. While true that the weapons mission at Los Alamos is the thrust of its work, what few people know is that the laboratory’s role as steward of the nation’s nuclear weapons stockpile — and the unique set of multidisciplinary capabilities it requires — enables a wide breadth of other non-weapons scientific pursuits: from developing an HIV vaccine, to research on Mars, to earthquake prediction.

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